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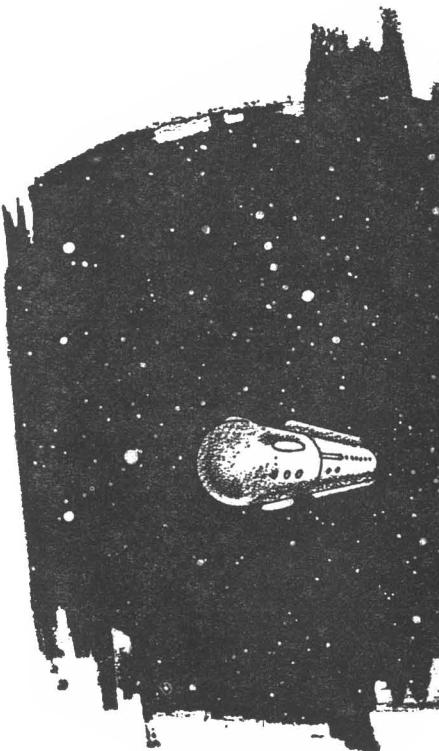
*Which answers mankind's
problems better: a stern
god or a tolerant one?
And what do you do if
you have the power to
decide it either way?*

LET THERE BE NIGHT

By ROBERT F. YOUNG

Illustrator SCHELLING

DEEP-SPACE undertows are rare, but when you get caught in one you may as well say farewell to your family and your friends, because you're never going to see any of them again.





schelling

The deep-space undertow that grabbed my one-man projectile-torpedo boat during the 2324 space maneuvers off Procyon 16 must have dragged the craft half-way across the galaxy. At any rate, when I re-emerged in normal space I couldn't spot so much as a single familiar constellation. For the record, my N.E.S.N. serial number is 44B-6507323, my rank is PT-boat pilot, second class, and my name is Benjamin Hill. Once upon a time I was a schoolteacher.

My undertow must have had a conscience of sorts, for it had permitted the PT-boat to surface near a star with a family of six planets. For lack of a better designation I dubbed the system "System X", and homed in on it in hopes of finding an amenable world on which I could live out the remainder of my years. X-4 looked pretty good. It had an inclination of 2.3 degrees, which meant seasons, and a spectroanalysis revealed an earth-type atmosphere. There was a moon, too—a great big one that moved in an orbit similar to the one maintained by Old Earth's moon. However, I wasn't interested in moons, and after a cursory glance at this one I dropped the PT-boat down closer to the planet in order to get a better look at my potential home-to-be.

Seas covered about four-fifths of the surface, and there was only

one habitable continent—a small land-mass with four long promontories stretching out from its main body somewhat in the manner of arms and legs. The other continents—if you want to call them that—were distributed in the arctic and the anarctic regions, and except for their northern and southern littorals were about as hospitable to warm-blooded life as a bunch of icebergs.

Well, one continent was better than none. I began orbiting in. Almost as though it had been waiting for me to come to my decision, the ion drive burned out.

Apparently my undertow had not had a conscience after all.

All that saved me were my retros and my drag chute. The retros enabled me to bring the PT-boat down on the habitable planet, albeit on a rugged mountainside, and the chute enabled me to bring the boat down gently enough to avert an accidental detonation of my payload of projectiles. Planetfall took place in the twilight belt, and when I stepped through the locks, the moon was just beginning to rise.

DID I say "moon"? I shouldn't have, because even though the term is technically correct it wasn't the word that came into my mind when the satellite rose above the horizon. "Man" was the word. Or maybe "god". Think-

ing back now, it's hard to tell.

"The man in the moon" is a familiar enough phenomenon to anyone who has ever visited Old Earth, and satellites with "faces" in them are no more unusual than comets with "tails". If a person looks hard enough and long enough, he can find a face in anything. But this face wasn't in the moon—it *was* the moon. Or, more accurately, it was that hemisphere which had been hidden from me during my approach and which I have been too preoccupied to notice while orbiting in for a landing. The moon, in toto, was a "head".

Unlike Old Earth's famed satellite, this satellite was young; its face, however, was anything but. It was the face of an old, old man—a cantankerous old man who hated planets, who hated people, who hated light and laughter; who hated, in short, just about anything or anyone you could think of. The frown embodied in that countenance was so intense that it was almost tangible, and it pervaded the very moonlight in which I stood.

I re-entered the PT-boat and aligned and focused one of the telescopic projectile-sights. The "forehead" was a vast plateau. The "eyebrows" were forested littorals. The "eyes" were seas. The "nose" was a mountain range. The "lips" were a pair of barren ridges. The "bearded"

"cheeks" were forested lowlands. The "chin" was a tundra. The "ears" were mesas, while the plateau that constituted the "forehead" extended up and back into a gleaming, "hairless" pate. The atmosphere softened the visage somewhat, but not nearly enough appreciably to affect its austerity.

A plateau, a pair of seas, a mountain range, two ridges, two mesas, a Paleozoic forest, and a tundra—interesting topography, certainly, but nothing to get particularly excited about for all its realistic physiognomic pattern. Nothing for a member of sophisticated society to get particularly excited about, that is. But how about a member of a naive society? Specifically, how about the race of people that had built the primitive village I had glimpsed in the distance while coming down on the mountainside? What would be, or rather, what had been, its reaction to such a phenomenon?

It was a discomfiting question, the more so because I couldn't answer it. Presently I gave up trying and went to bed. All through the night I lay half awake and half asleep, trying to put the life I once had known, and would never know again, behind me. In the morning I got together the few essentials I would need to see me to the village, pocketed a small ion pistol

just in case, secured the PT-boat's locks, and started down the mountainside. There are some people who do not need the presence of other people in order to live a rich and satisfying life. I am not one of them.

LIKE Zarathustra, I went down my mountain alone, meeting no one. In the forest below, however, I did not come upon an old man looking for roots. I came upon a girl bathing in a brook.

This is considerably simpler in the telling than it was in the actual doing. The half trek-half climb down that mountainside had taken me three days—twenty-six hour-ones—and I had been in the forest the better part of the fourth.

The girl had long auburn hair that looked darker than it really was because it was wet. She had big, almost luminous, gray eyes, an attractive nose, and rather full lips. A dimple dotted the center of her chin. There had been some doubt in my mind whether the natives of X-4 would turn out to be human—there are some recorded cases of planets of the genus Old Earth giving birth to nonhuman intelligences—but as I watched the girl, the doubt was dispelled. If anything, she was more than human, physically at least, and glimpsing the flash of her long symmetrical legs and the white gleamings of her grace-

ful arms and shoulders I felt like Adonis spying on Venus. If the analogy doesn't quite come off, I alone am to blame, because while I failed to qualify as Adonis, the girl in the brook was on a par with Venus, and then some.

I made myself comfortable in the underbrush and waited till such time as she should come out of the water, dress, and start for home. At length I saw her climb dripping up on the bank and start drying herself with a coarse cotton towel, shivering all the while in the cold spring wind that wafted through the forest. The drying operation completed, she slipped into several cotton undergarments, after which she spread out a rug-like length of some indeterminate material, lay down, and rolled herself up in it in such a way that only her arms, shoulders, and head protruded from one end, and her legs, from the knees down, from the other. When she stood up she was about as sexy as an animated stovepipe, and you would have thought that no further affront to her feminine dignity was possible. It was, though. The gray dress she proceeded to get into covered her from her neck to her ankles and was stayed so that it formed an upright cone. The animated stovepipe had now become an animated tepee.

Finally, after slipping her feet into a pair of clodhopper shoes,

she produced a comb from the voluminous interior of her dress and proceeded to comb her hair. It fell all the way to the small of her back, and how she managed to comb it straight back from her face and forehead and compress it into a bun no bigger than a billiard ball I'll never understand, but comb and compress it she did, after which she donned a bonnet that matched her dress and that hid not only all of her hair but half of her face as well. Looking at her, I saw no vestige whatsoever of the girl I had seen bathing in the brook, but fortunately—or unfortunately, as the case may be—I have a good memory.

A PATH bordered the opposite bank of the brook, and presently she started along it in the direction of the village. I waited till the trees hid her from view, then I forded the brook at a point where the waters ran relatively shallow, and detoured around her at a brisk dogtrot. Emerging on the path, I laid down on the ground and made like I had dropped in my tracks. It wasn't a particularly difficult subterfuge to bring off, for my three days on the mountainside and my three-quarters of a day in the forest had taken just about all the starch out of me, and the brisk dogtrot had decimated the modicum there was left.

I kept one eye on the alert in case the sight of me lying helpless on the path failed to evoke the reaction I was gambling on and evoke a diametrically different one instead. I needn't have worried: the minute she rounded a turn in the path and saw me, she became a veritable engine of concern and bore down upon me in a flurry of feminine tenderness. Kneeling beside me—no small accomplishment in that outfit she had on—she felt my forehead. Next, she lay her head upon my chest and listened for my heartbeat. All this while I had been watching her with one slitted eye; now, I opened both eyes, raised my head, and looked full into her face. We were so close, our noses almost touched. "*Pervitu es lliren?*" she asked, straightening abruptly.

I propped myself into a sitting position. Getting across the phony background I had decided upon—i.e., that I had suffered a total loss of memory, had wandered away from my own village (if there was one, there had to be others), and become lost in the forest—was no easy matter with nothing to work with except a series of improvised signs, but at length I managed, and was rewarded by a warm look of sympathetic understanding. Helping me to my feet, she pointed down the path in the direction of the village and indicated by means of

several improvised signs of her own that I was to accompany her to her home, where I would be suitably cared for. She even proffered her shoulder for me to lean on. I didn't avail myself of it, however, I may be an opportunist, but I draw the line when it comes to taking undue advantage of trusting females.

As we walked slowly along, she kept glancing curiously at my torn and begrimed space fatigues. I hoped they weren't too radically different from the garments worn by the menfolk of her village, and apparently they weren't, for after a while her interest waned and her glances pattered out. The trail widened gradually into a rutted road. The ruts spelled wagons, and hoof-marks in between them spelled some manner of equine beast of burden. The brook purled along beside the road, and occasionally I glimpsed small game in the underbrush bordering the opposite bank. Some of the trees had some kind of letters carved in their trunks. There were birds everywhere, and the way was sweet with their evening songs. In several sheltered places, pale patches of snow lingered. Certainly, I reflected, it was rather early in the season for a girl to be bathing in a brook.

Shadow lengthened around us, and I could tell from the way my companion kept trying to step up

our pace that she wanted to make it home before darkness fell. Noticing the increasing coolness of the air, I thought I knew why, but I didn't really till darkness actually did fall. Then, when she knelt down in the middle of the road and bowed her head, I realized that she was afraid.

Afraid of that silly satellite rising into the sky.

I made haste to kneel down beside her. I couldn't of course join her in the little prayer that she uttered—I learned afterward that it was a prayer beseeching forgiveness for being out after dark with a man to whom she was not betrothed—but obviously my comportment left nothing to be desired for, several moments later when she got to her feet and looked down at me, I saw gratitude shining in her eyes.

I stood up beside her. Before we started on our way again, I stole a look at old mountain-nose. I had already figured out his habits—that is to say, his orbital velocity and his trajectory—and knew that during each twenty-six hour period he rose and set at the same time and consequently underwent no phases. The look he gave me back seemed even dirtier than the previous looks I had rated. Now that I came to think of it, there was something familiar about that somber frown of his. Somewhere or other I had encountered it before. Suddenly I

remembered. I had seen it on the face of Michelangelo's Yahweh in the Sistine Chapel.

THE village began without preamble. It was situated near the shore of a small lake, and consisted of a cluster of perhaps three thousand buildings criss-crossed by avenues and side streets just wide enough for two medium sized wagons to pass comfortably. With the exception of a half dozen large, factory-like structures standing in a sizable clearing on the outskirts, the buildings were all alike, so a description of the one the girl led me to should suffice. The ground floor measured something like 35X35X12 feet and was constructed of heavy planking. Two square windows and a thick rectangular door distinguished the façade from the other three sides, and there was a small plot of ground separating it from the street. At first glance, the second floor seemed to be nothing more than a set of shingleless rafters rising steeply into a series of individual peaks; at second glance, however, the glass roofing material became visible, and you realized that you were confronted with a large second-story room, the walls and ceiling of which were one enormous skylight. Rising along the rear wall and protruding from the transparent peak was a stone chimney, and

from its mouth issued a thin trail of smoke.

The girl opened the door and we went inside. Like the second floor, the ground floor consisted of but one room. It was commodious enough, however, and functioned as living room, dining room, and kitchen. The kitchen was located along the rear wall and featured a big stone hearth in which an anemic wood-fire was burning. Next to the hearth, a ladder climbed the wall to a trap door in the ceiling. The dining room was little more than a round wooden table, several wooden chairs, and a box-like affair that functioned as a sort of buffet and cupboard combined. The living room was about as cozy as a third-class spaceport waiting room. There was a long wooden bench, a wooden arm-chair, and a small wooden table. On the table burned the source of the room's sole illumination—a primitive oil lamp with a glass chimney. Attached to the table's legs a few feet above the bare plank floor was a rack, and on this rack lay a thick book bound in black leather. No one needed to tell me what kind of a book it was, and no one needed to tell me who—or rather, what—its subject matter concerned.

"In" the kitchen stood a woman. She was wearing a camouflage-bonnet and a tepee dress, and she was engaged in stirring

the contents of a large cast-iron kettle that was suspended over the anemic flames of the hearth-fire. "In" the living room sat a man. He was wearing skin-tight black trousers and a black frock coat that came all the way to his knees, and he was engaged in making entries in a large ledger that lay on his lap.

Both the man and the woman looked up when the girl and I came in, and when the girl spoke several words to them they came hurrying over to my side. The man was tall and thin and bearded, and about twice my age (I was twenty-nine at the time). He looked as though he had lost his last friend. The woman was somewhat younger than he was, almost as thin, and she looked as though she too had lost her last friend. Glancing at the girl, I saw the melancholy in her eyes for the first time, and realized that she also looked as though she had lost her last friend. I began to wish that I had remained on my mountain.

THE man indicated that I should lie down on the wooden bench, and after I did so he left the house. While he was gone, the girl brought forth a small basket of greens from the interior of her tepee-dress—her excuse, no doubt, for getting out of the house—and set it conspicuously on the buffet-cupboard; then she

got a bowl, spooned some of the iron kettle's contents into it, brought it over to the bench and, kneeling down on the floor, began to spoon-feed me. I sat up a little guiltily then and took the bowl and the spoon from her and began feeding myself. The food was plain, but compared to the PT-boat rations I had been living on for the last four days it was delicious, and I ate every morsel of it. By this time, the man had returned with another man who was also tall and thin and bearded and who also wore skin-tight black trousers and a black, knee-length frock coat. There was a leather sack slung from his neck somewhat in the manner early-American frontiersmen used to carry their powder horns, but the sack didn't have powder in it, it had dried roots. He handed several of them to the woman and she got another, smaller, iron kettle, pumped some water into it from a pump that stood in a corner of the kitchen, added the roots, and hung the kettle beside the big one. Unless I missed my guess, I was in for a dose of spring tonic, X-4 style, that would put iron in my blood.

All of which led me willy-nilly to a rather discomfiting question —to wit, had the medical component of this quaint little culture reached that phase in its development wherein phlebotomy was practiced? Apparently it had

not, for, after sitting down beside the bench in a chair provided him by my host, the newcomer confined himself to a few taps on my forehead, a look into each of my eyes, and a squint into each of my ears, after which he reslung his sack, said a few words to the man and the woman, and departed. I lay back on the bench with considerable relief.

The dining-room table was set, and husband, wife, and daughter—for such I had concluded their relationship to be—sat down to eat. Well no, they didn't sit down to eat exactly, although eating did play a small role in the proceedings: they sat down to pray. The husband acted as spokesman, and what he had to say took the better part of half an hour and all the while he was saying it he and the two women kept their eyes fixed steadfastly on the round tabletop. I didn't know it at the time, but I found out later that the tabletop symbolized the face of the moon; nevertheless, I did know that the prayer was directed toward none other than the deity whom the moon embodied, and I could tell from what little I could see of their expressions that husband, wife, and daughter were momentarily afraid that the three bowls of stew growing cold on the table before them would be snatched mysteriously away before they had a chance to get busy with

their spoons. Judging from the way they finally gobbled down their food, the fear still remained even after the prayer was over.

The meal finished, the woman cleared the table and started washing the dishes, the man returned to the living room and his ledger, and the girl busied herself stirring the contents of the second kettle. At length she spooned a quantity of the mixture into a cup, brought the cup over to where I was lying, and indicated that I should drink from it. I did so reluctantly. The stuff tasted like boiled crabgrass flavored with hickory bark.

THE next item on my evening's agenda was bed. The girl got another lamp, lit it, and led the way up the ladder to the second floor. Talk about your crazy rooms! This one looked for all the world like a big greenhouse. True, there weren't any plants or flowers, but there wasn't any furniture either. All the place contained, so far as I could see, were three mattresses and a big wooden box. However, the girl dug a fourth mattress out of the box and spread it at the base of one of the transparent walls; then, from the same receptacle she procured two blankets, plus a pillow that looked as though it was stuffed with corncobs, and handed the three items to me.

The pillow was stuffed with

corncobs. So was the mattress. But I was tired enough to sleep on anything, and after the girl departed down the ladder with the lamp, closing the trap door behind her, I sprawled out on the mattress with a sigh of contentment and pulled one of the blankets up to my chin. Looking up through the glass ceiling, I saw old mountain-nose looking down on me. The old boy had climbed quite high in the sky by this time, but obviously the additional elevation hadn't helped his disposition any, for the look he gave me was just as dirty as usual. Good lord! I thought suddenly, he can see into every bedroom in the whole village and see everything that goes on in them! Is that why the walls and ceilings are made of glass?

I laughed aloud. "You really have got these poor sheep scared out of their wits, haven't you old man?" I said. "You don't scare me, though—not one bit—so go ahead and glare all you want to, and be damned!" I closed my eyes then, and the next thing I knew, the old boy was gone, and his grandfather the sun was climbing into the sky.

MY host relegated the task of "restoring my memory" to his daughter, an eventually that provided me with an even pleasanter setup for learning the language and more than I had hoped

for. So you see, a little discretion sometimes pays respectable dividends. Sure, I could have come barging into the village discharging my ion pistol and proclaiming myself the Leader of the People by virtue of my technological godhood, and I might even have gotten away with it; but I never would have been accepted by the people I presumed to lead, and, more important, I never would have truly understood them. The only way truly to understand a race of people is by finding out what makes its culture tick, and the only way to find out what makes a culture tick is by examining it from the inside. People never reveal the innermost secrets of their way of life to a foreigner, regardless of how deeply he may impress them. In the present case, by posing as a member of the race I wanted to understand I had removed this formidable barrier, and nothing would be withheld from me for the simple reason that to all apparent intents and purposes nothing was really being revealed to me. And I wanted to know everything there was to know, because no matter how superior an individual may be to any given culture, he cannot operate in it effectively unless he thoroughly understands it. Conversely, once he does thoroughly understand it, he can, by remaining within the framework of its

mores, gain virtually any end he wants.

The first thing I learned was that the girl-of-the-brook's name was Ugla Fyrrenha. I am not going to refer to her by any such uncomely combination of letters, however. "Ugla", roughly translated into English, becomes "Chastity", while "Fyrrenha", similarly translated, becomes "smithy" or, taking a logical step forward, "Smith". Neither am I going to refer to any of the other inhabitants of X-4 by their original names, and the same goes for place-names. If you think I'm taking undue liberty in this matter, consider several place-names chosen at random: *Tititiknotto-fungililibus Renla, Sedisfoppentotten Hargg, and Freddirap-proppolandis*. Now consider their English equivalents: "Cape Celestial", "Blue Lake", and "Purity".

Purity was the name of the village where Chastity lived, and this was the second thing I learned. It was one of the four major inland towns of the continent (to the natives, the term was "the world") of Perfection. The three other towns were Righteousness, Integrity, and Transcendence. In addition to the four major inland towns, there were six major coastal towns: Truth, Prudence, Straight-and-Narrow-Path, Discretion, Virtue, and Humility. The inland towns

served as hubs for farming, lumbering, mining, and manufacturing, while the coastal towns served as hubs for the fishing industry.

An X-4 year consisted of some 320 days. Perfection's monetary standard was platinum. Chastity's father's name was Upright. Her mother's name was Dutiful. Upright operated a smithery on the outskirts of the town, and in addition to his regular duties served, as did the rest of the married males of the community, as a sort of patriarch-parson whose duty it was to teach, preach, and, on the rare occasions when it became necessary, to administer justice. Most of the time his activities along these lines did not extend beyond the walls of his own home, but he was responsible along with his fellow patriarch-parsons for the spiritual, moral, and intellectual level of Purity as a whole, and shared with them the task of administering to the husbandless families of the community; consequently there were evenings when he was absent from his own household. On such occasions supper, the one and only formal meal of the day, was held up until he returned, since eating at the table of the Divine Overseer was unthinkable without first reciting the Prayer of Permission, a function which only a patriarch-parson could perform.

ALL of which brings us to the subject of that evil-minded old man up there in the sky. The story, as told to me by Chastity after I learned the language, runs pretty much as follows: Millenia ago, the Divine Overseer had had it made up there among the clouds with nothing much to do save gaze benevolently down on the Great Sea he had created in order that he might see the reflection of his face. He had had his body then, and it had been a splendid body indeed, and the Divine Overseer had been tremendously proud of it, lavishing upon it the best of care in order that it would remain eternally resplendent in the radiance of the Great Lamp he had created and hung high in the sky. Then, one day, along came the Divine Overseer's archenemy, He-Who-Had-No-Right-To-Be, and there ensued in the heavens a great battle the like of which had never been known before and would never be known again. He-Who-Had-No-Right-To-Be was armed with a mighty sword, but the Divine Overseer disdained the use of weapons and fought with his bare hands. For years, the battle raged. For centuries. Finally realizing that he had met his match, He-Who-Had-No-Right-To-Be resorted to trickery and canted his sword in such a way that the radiance emanating from the Great Lamp ricocheted from

the blade into the Divine Overseer's eyes, temporarily blinding him. Around and down came the mighty sword, half severing the Divine Overseer's head from his shoulders, and for a moment it looked as though the battle was over. Not so. A lesser being might have thrown in the towel, but not a being of the Divine Overseer's caliber. With his head threatening momentarily to fall off, he closed in on He-Who-Had-No-Right-ToBe and, seizing the entity's body with his cyclopean hands, tore it to pieces and flung the pieces into the deep distances all around, where they became stars. He-Who-Had-No-Right-To-Be's sword, the Divine Overseer broke across his knee, after which he flung one piece into the east and the other into the west so that for all eternity the blood he had shed would be visible in the sky each time the Great Lamp rose and each time it set. This final herculean deed, however, proved to be the Divine Overseer's undoing, and his head, which all the while had been dangling by no more than a tendon or two, at last detached itself from his shoulders. Then a strange thing happened: instead of his head falling into the Great Sea and floating thereon, his body did, while his head remained in the sky. The second it struck the water, the body lost its resplendence and turned to clay, while the

head on the other hand became more resplendent than before because in it was concentrated the entire essence of the Divine Overseer. He looked down in sorrow at his once-magnificent body and resolved to keep surveillance over it for the rest of time, and in order to make certain that no harm befell it he created tiny creatures in his former image and made them custodians of his flesh. One of these creatures was the Divine Overseer's favorite, and this creature was called the Little Overseer. Working with the Divine Overseer, he drew up a contract wherein the Divine Overseer agreed to let the people live and prosper on his flesh provided they never kept their activities concealed from his watchful eyes and provided they could live and prosper without sin, which was defined as any act detrimental to the dignity of the Divine Overseer's sacred and sexless body. The people agreed to the terms, and the Little Overseer signed the contract.

I COULDN'T help wondering what kind of a religious cosmogony and what kind of a covenant the Little Overseer and his henchmen would have dreamed up if there had been a smile instead of a frown on that celestial countenance. But you can bet your spaceboots that I didn't share my speculations with Chas-

tity. Instead, I let on that the story was familiar to me—which was true, in a way—and that I thought my memory was finally beginning to come back.

We were returning from the little swimming hole where I had first seen her, and we had been gathering edible greens. As you can well imagine, I had made no reference to her previous visit to the hole, nor to my presence in the underbrush while she had been splashing around in her birthday suit. "It is good that your mind is clearing, Benjamin," she said. (I had broken down my first name to its literal meaning and had translated it along with my last into "Perfection".) "Father has mentioned several times that he would be glad to take you on as an apprentice at the smithery were it not for your befuddled memory. He is waiting eagerly for the news of your complete cure."

This was strictly in keeping with my plans. "Even though I haven't been able to recall which of the ten towns I came from," I said, "and even though there are a few other odds and ends that still elude me, I think he should take me on at once so that I can start paying him back for his hospitality. You can continue with my ed—my cure evenings."

"Of course, Benjamin."

At this point, a wagon drawn by a team of small but sturdy

horses came down the rutted road, and as it passed on, Chastity made a quaint little curtsey for the benefit of the driver, a lean, bearded man in his late thirties or early forties with dark hair and shrewd brown eyes. He smiled warmly at her, glared at me, and drove on. "Someone you know?" I asked her.

Her bonnet didn't afford a very extensive view of her cheeks, but just the same I got the definite impression that they had turned pink. "He is Strongwill Dimity. I—I am betrothed to him."

I stared at her. "But he's old enough to be your father!"

"Which makes the honor even greater, does it not? It should be every young woman's wish to marry a man above and beyond her years who can provide for her as well as if he were her own father. Truly, Benjamin, there are still many things you have not yet recalled."

There sure were. "How long have you been betrothed to him?" I asked.

"Since he asked my father for my hand when I was nine years old."

I had been wondering all along how the men in this society ever managed to spot the particular woman they wanted to marry when custom commanded that all girls from the age of ten on up wear rolled rugs, tepees, and cam-

ouflage-bonnets. Now I knew. "And how much longer must you be betrothed to him before he can marry you?" I went on.

"For yet another year. I shall become of marriageable age then."

"And nothing can change all this?"

"Only a setback in Strongwill's success in his chosen business, which is the manufacturing of women's garments. And this would not change it either unless the setback were sufficiently severe to reduce his financial status to a level inferior to that of my father's."

"H'm'm," I said. And then, "I take it he's been quite successful. Strongwill, I mean."

"He is one of the richest men in Purity, and of course one of the most devout and pure, since only upon those who walk righteously in the light of the Divine Overseer does financial fortune fall."

The good old Protestant Ethic, I thought. Aloud, I said, "Tell me the truth, Chastity—do you *really* want to marry him?"

She seemed inordinately interested in a patch of wild flowers that bloomed beside the road. "I—I consider it to be a fitting and auspicious arrangement."

"That's what I thought," I said. "Well, I guess the sooner I go to work for your father, the better."

NOT knowing my plans, she quite naturally took it for granted that I had changed the subject, and the matter of her marriage was not brought up again during our walk back to the town. I went to work in the smithery the next morning. It was a big plank building with open areas in the roof for the heat and the charcoal fumes to escape through and it stood in a large clearing in the forest a little distance back from the shore of the lake. The forges were primitive affairs, and the *modus operandi* was downright ridiculous. Now, it's no trick at all for an average man from a technologically mature society to advance himself in a society in which technology is in the embryo stage; nevertheless, I didn't try to introduce modern techniques into Upright's smithery overnight. Instead, I contented myself with making this minor change and that, with Upright's approval of course, and in each instance I let on that I was as surprised as he was when the change resulted in higher production and better products. There was one other apprentice besides myself—a bright young fellow named Stanch Meadows—and it wasn't very long before we were getting out our work in half the time Upright had allotted for it. This state of affairs afforded me the psychological opportunity

which I had been patiently waiting for, and I discreetly suggested to Upright that it might be a good idea to make use of the time we had saved by putting Stanch and myself to work building a wing, with the object in mind of turning the smithery into a combination smithery and foundry and producing our own iron. What I had in mind was a small steel mill and foundry combined, but I didn't say so, for steel—true steel, that is—was unknown in Perfection. Anyway, Upright went for the idea and ordered the necessary materials, and Stanch and I went to work.

I don't pretend to be much of a carpenter or much of a mason, nor do I pretend to be an engineer; but, having been exposed to what is known on New Earth as an all-purpose education, I knew enough about the two trades and the profession to be able to build a primitive steel mill without too much trouble. When it came time to build a furnace—the most important phase of the project—I didn't try for anything fancy, not only because I was incapable of building an advanced electric hearth, but because I hadn't "invented" electricity yet and didn't intend to for some time to come. The people of Perfection were still too unsophisticated to be able to accept so radical an innovation, and if I had come up with it out of a clear blue sky,

the feat could very well have been construed as being magical in nature and have inspired comment to the effect that I just might be in league with He-Who-Had-No-Right-To-Be, whose *disjecta membra*, it was said, sometimes exerted influence on certain individuals who did not walk quite righteously enough in the light of the D.O. No, rather than stick my neck out, I settled for a small Bessemer Converter, and I must say, it filled the bill quite nicely. Next, I doubled back and got to work on a small blast furnace, and afterward, a number of small ladles, following which I tried my hand at a modest rolling mill, the materials for which I manufactured myself with Stanch's able assistance, and a soaking pit. Finally, again with the able assistance of Stanch, who had turned out to be an ideal right-hand man, I built a simple, hand-hoist operated stamping press and made several reasonably accurate dies. Meanwhile, I had gotten in a supply of raw materials, and a week later, Upright Smith & Co., to the consternation of its owner, started turning out stainless-steel pots and pans that made the cast-iron ones on the market look sick. The old man came through with a ten-percent partnership, and I was on my way.

Getting Strongwill Dimity out of the picture was only a

minor part of my over-all plan; nevertheless, I decided that the sooner I took care of the matter, the better. Hence the next item on my industrial agenda was a textile mill. After I built it, I installed the most modern equipment I could devise. Although my machines fell far short of being modern by New Earth standards, they were downright *avant-garde* by Perfection standards, and once I got a steady supply of cotton coming in from Straight-and-Narrow-Path, the southernmost of the inland towns, I was turning out women's wear at half the existent market-price and had one-third of the women of Purity, including Chastity, working for me. Old Strongwill didn't have a chance, and Dimity & Co. closed down lock, stock, and barrel. I met him on the street not long afterward, and I still bear the scars left by the two holes his eyes burned through me as we passed each other.

WITH three months still to go, Upright Smith himself broke the betrothal, saying that no daughter of his was going to marry a pauper. The action was tantamount to condemning Chastity to spinsterhood—or would have been under ordinary circumstances—since it was highly improbable that any of the town's eligible bachelors would propose to a girl whose physical qualifica-

tions were an unknown quality. And in the event that there might be one or two who could remember what Chastity had looked like before donning the rolled-rug, teepee-dress, and camouflage-bonnet of maidenhood, the odds were one hundred-to-one that they were already betrothed. So, as you can see, I had a pretty clear field.

I didn't take advantage of it right away, however: I had a number of other things I wanted to do first. You might think that owning ten percent of a booming steel mill and one hundred percent of a thriving textile mill would have been enough to satisfy me. But such was far from being the case. Men are never mediocre because they lack the will to power: they are mediocre because they cannot forge ahead of their civilizations. On my own world, I had been small potatoes indeed; on this one, thanks to my fortuitous advanced-knowhow, I could easily become king of the hill. So maybe in my own civilization I *had* had to settle for an ill-paying teacher's post, and afterward, when war threatened and the draft caught up to me, a second-class pilotship in the New Earth Space Navy: in *this* civilization I didn't have to settle for anything. In *this* civilization I could climb right up to the top of the ladder, provided I kept my nose clear on the way and provided I kept my operations well

within the framework of the religious structure.

Religious structures like the Sacred Trust of the Divine Overseer are made to order for opportunistic people like myself. The procedure for forging ahead is simple. First, you establish yourself as a devout, god-fearing citizen, then you hang a religious connotation on everything you do, all the while keeping strictly on the path of righteousness. You save every cent you can, pay your employees as little as possible, and consicuously hand out pennies to kids. People who worship selfish gods like to be treated like dirt, and they love nothing better than to have a self-made rich man walk all over them, provided said rich man's feet are free from sin. I made sure mine were.

I "invented" the gasoline engine, and not long afterward I brought forth Perfection's first automobile—the Hill Roamer. Again, I didn't try for anything fancy, but settled for a compact job that could be feasibly operated on the existent streets and avenues, and that could generally be depended upon to start up when you wanted it to and to stop when you wanted it to. I had a dozen assistants working for me by this time under the supervision of Stanch, and they in turn had assistants of their own; consequently it wasn't very long before I had a stamping plant in ac-

tion, and an assembly plant to go with it. The lack of electrical power was a handicap of course, but the people of Perfection still weren't sufficiently sophisticated to take it in their stride, and I had decided to wait a while longer before "inventing" it. Let them get used to my automobile first, then I would give them electricity—and all that went with it.

MY next project was a highway construction company. Ideally, I should have built my highways before I manufactured and sold my automobiles, but in order to build highways you need to exact taxes from the people who are going to use them, and in order to get the people to suffer such an ignominy you have to make them want the highways. Hence you sell them automobiles first. To obtain the tax money I would need, I instigated with the help of Upright Smith the establishment of the "Ten Town Council". Each of the ten towns elected a patriarch-parson to represent it, whereupon Upright, whom I had helped win the Purity seat, convened the group in the capitol building which I had built in Integrity, the most centrally located of the ten towns. It was no trick at all to sell the ten representatives on the idea of connecting the towns with "hard-topped roads", but selling them on the idea of financing the venture by

exacting taxes from their constituents was something else. Just the same, though, I had them beat before I even started, because they knew as well as I did that if the people wanted to drive their automobiles outside of town they were going to have to pay for the privilege out of their own pockets. The measure was enacted into law, and a tax structure was set up to levy and collect the necessary revenue.

I ran my first highway from Purity to Righteousness, then I linked Righteousness with Integrity, and Integrity with Transcendence. From Integrity, I ran a real super-duper of a job to Straight-and-Narrow-Path, after which I linked all of the coastal towns together. Finally I doubled back from Truth and Humility, the easternmost and westernmost coastal towns, to Righteousness and Transcendence respectively, and as a finishing touch I ran a six-lane turnpike from Transcendence to Purity and extended it into the forest in the direction of my mountain to a thickly wooded area where I planned on opening a lumber mill sometime in the future.

You should have seen those people take to the road. For a while I thought I was going to have another late-twentieth century U.S. on my hands—or perhaps I should say "hoped", because that was the sort of setup I

was aiming for—but such did not prove to be the case. The people of Perfection never drove for pleasure per se. They drove only when they needed to transport themselves from point A to point B, and vice versa, or only when they needed to transport goods and materials between the two points. It was this final development that opened my eyes to an aspect of my brave new world that I had thus far overlooked: the need for mechanical freight-carriers. Getting my assistants together, I made a few change-overs in my road-building equipment plant and began turning out tractors and trailers. To light the way, I went into the trucking business myself, cleaning up a modest fortune, and after that, I couldn't manufacture tractors and trailers fast enough. No problem there: I simply built another plant. Before long, the highways started to go to pot. No problem there, either: I merely notified the Ten Town Council and started building new ones. I started an automobile factory in Righteousness, one in Prudence, and one in Discretion. I organized a petroleum refining company to replace the catch-as-catch-can arrangement I had with an oil-well drilling outfit in Transcendence. I began stringing service stations, roadside restaurants, and motels all over the land. The technological sun had

at last risen over Perfection and the technological millennium was on hand. If you doubted it, all you had to do was to look at the sky over Purity during the morning and afternoon rush-hours and see the smog.

The time had come to "invent" electricity. I "invented" it.

WELL, I got into just about every industry you can think of before I finally got around to asking for Chastity's hand. I was thirty-two by then, and the richest man in Perfection. Upright and Dutiful raised no objections—indeed, they virtually threw their darling daughter on my lap—and after a special bethrothal period of six months, the marriage ceremony was performed by none other than Upright himself in the Smith homestead. By this time I had of course gotten around to building a house of my own—a slightly larger version of the standard Perfection dwelling complete with skylight-roof. After the marriage ceremony, Chastity and I retired to the woods, as was the custom, and spent the major part of our wedding night wrapped snugly in her rug-petticoat beneath the camouflaging branches of a big tree. Toward morning, we carved our initials in the trunk, reserving the tree as ours so that it should be available to us in the future; then, hand in hand, we walked through

the forest to our new home. There, we spread our mattresses on opposite sides of the sleeping room and slept the rest of the night. Several times I awoke, and each time, I saw that evil-minded old man up there in the sky glaring down at me through the skylight-roof as though he knew exactly what had gone on beneath the concealing branches of "our" tree.

We had been married for almost a year when the recession set in. There was nothing mysterious about this new turn of affairs: the people had bought just about everything they needed, and the in-built obsolescence of my products had yet to manifest itself. Nor would it for at least another year. However, I wasn't worried, for I had anticipated just such an impasse and had gone into the production of luxury items to assist my brave new world over its first economic hurdle. In less than a week I had the establishments of my various retail merchants stocked with every manner of electrical appliance and fun product you can think of and was sitting back in my executive easy-chair waiting to enjoy the fruits of my foresight.

The fruits were not forthcoming.

I couldn't believe it at first when my merchants began phoning me (I had thrown in the telephone as a sort of bonus when I

had given electricity to my brave new world) and telling me that my new products weren't moving. It is an established economic fact that consumers will buy luxuries even when doing so deprives them of the means to buy necessities, and yet these consumers of mine, all of them reasonably prosperous, all of them well-stocked up on the things they needed, and all of them unaware that their possessions were foredoomed to go on the fritz, were refusing to buy so much as a single nonessential item. What in the world had gone wrong?

I WENT on a survey trip and interviewed a dozen retail merchants chosen at random. None of them threw any light on the mystery until, quite by accident, I asked the last one I visited if *he* had bought any of the new products. To my astonishment, he replied, "No, of course not!"

"What do you mean, 'no, of course not'?" I asked. "Is there something wrong with the new products?"

"Oh no, Mr. Hill. Their excellence is in keeping with the excellence everybody has come to expect in all your products."

"Then why haven't you bought any of them?"

"Because I don't *need* them."

"But you don't have to *need* something in order to buy it. All you have to do is *want* it."

"Oh, but I couldn't buy something simply because I *wanted* it, Mr. Hill. To do so would involve self-indulgence, and you know as well as I do that those who indulge themselves fall into disfavor with the Divine Overseer."

So *that* was it! "Then you've known all along why the new products weren't moving!" I said. "Why didn't you tell me in the first place?"

"But I didn't know, Mr. Hill. I only knew why I myself couldn't buy any of them. I'm a merchant, not a customer."

"But when you contemplate buying something, even when you contemplate buying it from yourself, you automatically become a customer—or at least a potential customer. Can't you see that?"

His mouth fell slightly ajar. "Why, I never thought of it that way before, Mr. Hill. You're right, of course. But what are we going to do?"

It was a good question. Driving back to Purity that night along one of my fine new highways, I tried desperately to answer it. The recession—or depression, to call a spade a spade—would last for at least a year, and my brave new world simply wasn't resilient enough to endure such a prolonged ordeal. Before the year was up, the people would reject the technological blessings that I had bestwoed upon them

and go back to their old way of life, and I, Benjamin Hill, would be out in the cold.

Well no, not out in the cold exactly. I'd be able to save *some* of my fortune. Nevertheless, my chances of realizing my rightful destiny would be doomed.

It was midsummer, and the night was warm. All of the stars were out. The D.O. was nearly at zenith. How he managed it, I don't know, but when I looked up at him I got the impression that he was sneering at me.

Well he might. He had won after all.

Or had he?

Pulling over onto the shoulder, I parked the car and gazed up into that frowning face. At the plateau-forehead and the littoral-eyebrows. At the sea-eyes and the mountain-range nose. At the ridge-lips and the forest-cheeks. At the tundra-chin. If the corners of that grim mouth could be lifted just a hair . . . If the contour of that brooding brow could be softened ever so little.

If, indeed! "Well what are you waiting for, Benjamin Hill?" I asked. "The Fourth of July?"

I STOPPED off in Purity just long enough to pick up a few supplies and to tell Chastity that I would be gone for several more days; then I drove on through to the site of my intended lumber mill, parked my car, and set out

for my mountain on foot. My mountain and my PT-boat . . . and my projectiles.

You see what had happened, don't you? I had said, "Come," and my brave new world had followed—up to the point where following had involved changing the image of its god. Then it had balked, and for good reason: it hadn't been able to change the image of its god.

It hadn't been able to because, unlike the images most civilizations have of their gods, this image wasn't mental. It wasn't, in the strict sense of the word, an image at all, but a concrete fact.

If you can't alter your god's visage, you can't alter his attitude either.

The people of Perfection were no different from any other kind of people. They would gladly have altered their divinity's expression to fit the changing times—if they only could have. As a matter of fact, they would have done the job some time ago, and the sociological change that was trying to take place would already have taken place, and the dark ages would have been no more. But the job, even if they had known how to go about it, was utterly beyond their capabilities.

It wasn't beyond mine.

It took me three days to reach my PT-boat. It took me two more to calculate my trajectories and

to align my projective tubes. On the dawn of the sixth, I launched my projectiles. Four of them. The D.O. wasn't in the sky then, of course, but when he climbed up among the stars that night he got his comeuppance but good. A medium-megaton thermo-nuclear warhead doesn't create much of a visual display when you're watching the show from a distance of some three hundred thousand miles, and all I saw were four tiny mushrooms rising up from the Brobdingnagian face, two in the region of the eyebrows and two in the regions of the corners of the mouth. But that was enough: I knew that I had scored four direct hits.

Pretty soon, a smile appeared on the old boy's lips—not a broad smile, but a sort of Gioconda smile. The brooding aspect of the brow became rapidly less acute, and gradually the austere expression transmuted to one of gentle firmness. It was exactly the sort of change I had wanted—one subtle enough to escape the people's awareness on the conscious, but not on the unconscious, level. My brave new world was saved.

Standing on the mountainside, I looked out over the promised land and raised my arms. "Let there be light!" I said.

THREE more days passed before I got back to Purity. I

drove through the evening streets and avenues, wondering if my face-lifting job had had any effect yet. The town was bright with the radiance of the electric street lamps that I had had installed on every corner, but save for an occasional married couple on their way to the forest, I saw no one.

I wasn't disappointed. I knew it was too soon to expect results. *Zeitgeists die hard.*

Still and all, though, I reflected, there ought to be some sign somewhere that this one was on its way out.

There was, but I didn't find it in the streets. I shouldn't have looked for it there in the first place. I found it in my own house. On the buffet-cupboard. In the form of a combination electric can-opener and knife-sharpener.

"I—I saw it in Affable Gray's store this morning and I just couldn't resist buying it," Chastity said. "I—I hope you don't mind, Benjamin."

I cupped her face in my hands and kissed her through the narrow opening of her bonnet. "Mind? Sweetheart, I love you for it!" I said.

* * *

The next morning, my Righteousness distributor phoned and told me that my new line of merchandise was beginning to move. I received a similar call that afternoon from my Discretion dis-

tributor. Checking on the Purity end of the business, I learned that Chastity had been far from the only consumer to succumb to the temptation of my irresistible items, and that sales were increasing by the hour. The depression, clearly, was being put to rout.

I had already "invented" radio. Now, the psychological moment had arrived for my greatest "invention" of all: television. I got busy and "invented" it.

Naturally, I had to set up a TV station, but this proved to be no problem. Once I had it in operation, I put Stanch in charge of popular programming and handed over the educational programming to Upright, with the suggestion that he choose several of Perfection's most capable patriarch-parsons and let them dispense their knowledge on a country-wide, rather than on a familial, scale. He was amenable to the idea, and he even agreed to plug an experimental technological institute that I had recently begun building in Prudence.

Chastity bore me a son. A year later, she bore me a daughter.

As more and more people bought automobiles and began driving them for pleasure, traffic increased, and as a consequence, more highways had to be built, not to mention more service stations, more motels, and more roadside restaurants. To keep the

economic ball rolling, I instituted seven annual fun days and timed them so that they appeared at regular intervals on the Gregorian-based calendar which I had previously introduced, and calculated their occurrence in such a way that they always fell either on a Friday or on a Monday. Thus far, I had functioned as a sort of one-man progress-concern; now, however, as the Perfectians began to shed their naïveté, I began to have competition. An eponymous patriarch-parson named Forward Townson opened a country-wide chain of roadside restaurants; a young man named Goodwill Furrow went into the farm-machinery business and began turning out tractors and combines; and Strongwill Dimity made a comeback in the women's garment industry by employing the same mass-production techniques that had brought about his downfall. This was only the beginning.

The Ten Town Council functioned effectively enough for a while, enacting this piece of legislation and that as the need arose; but, as time passed and the socio-economic structure grew more and more complex, it became increasingly apparent that a larger governing body under the guidance of a single individual was needed. In a word, the moment had arrived for me to get myself elected president. I

set up the necessary political machinery and got myself voted into office for a term of six years.

BENJAMIN, Jr. was nine by this time, and Little Chastity was eight. Chastity was a mature and beautiful woman of thirty-two. I built a White House in Integrity, and the four of us moved into it. After we were settled, I convened the representatives whom I had gotten elected along with me, and the cabinet leader whom I had appointed; then I called in my presidential advisor, Stanch Meadows, and the bunch of us got busy and enacted the legislation and set up the judicial system necessary to keep our lusty young society from hoisting itself by its own petard. In addition, we streamlined Perfection's cumbersome monetary system and levied sufficient taxes to balance the new federal budget. I had grown a beard quite some time ago, and now I was glad that I had, for it lent me the dignity that my new position called for. In fact, it even made me look a little bit like Abraham Lincoln.

Benjamin, Jr. liked living in the White House. So did Little Chastity. As for Chastity, she adored the place. I hadn't tried for an exact facsimile of the pre WW-III U.S. job; nevertheless, there was a striking resemblance between the two structures, just as there was a striking resem-

blance between my brave new civilization and the civilization that had existed in late twentieth-century U.S. prior to the War and the Interregnum. However, as I've stated earlier in these memoirs, this was the sort of setup I was aiming for. Nor was I sticking my neck out, as you might at first think. I had "invented" electricity and I had "invented" the gasoline motor—yes—and I had even "invented" gun powder; but there was one form of power which I had not "invented" and which I had no intention of "inventing", and that was atomic energy. *My* brave new world had no Achilles' heel.

One thing that had bugged me for a long time was the matter of fashions. Women still dressed exactly the way they had dressed before the technological revolution, and so did men. Prior to my election to the presidency, I had been powerless to do anything about this stubborn adherence to the past; now, however, I was powerless no longer. "Chastity," I said one day, "take that ridiculous bonnet off your head and do something about your hair!"

At first she was shocked, but after I explained to her that as the wife of the President of Perfection she had a moral obligation to establish precedence, she was enthusiastic about the idea—so enthusiastic, in fact, that I

had to tone down some of her suggestions and rule out others. The change, I told her, would have to be gradual—the abandonment of the camouflage-bonnet first, and the creation of a conservative coiffeur; then slight alterations in the tepee-dress, and so on. "And while you're subtly influencing women's fashions," I added, "I'll be subtly influencing men's."

We couldn't miss. Oh, there were a few diehards who clung to the old ways—there always are; but the vast majority of the people imitated us like chimpanzees. Bonnets disappeared. So did knee-length frock coats. Tepees went off the market, and so too, eventually, did rolled-rug petticoats. People began looking like people, and the garment industry boomed. Ironically, Strongwill Dimity profited the most, broadening out into men's clothing and becoming a millionaire almost overnight. But that was all right—he had as much right to make money as anyone else had. What annoyed me was his going into the distillery industry soon afterward and flooding my brave new world with cheap whiskey. Some people are never satisfied no matter how much money they make.

Otherwise, matters proceeded smoothly. My extra-official activities paid off handsomely and my popularity increased. At the end of my first six-year term, I was

re-elected with only a token of resistance, and my brave new world took another giant step forward in the direction of the Millennium.

The Millennium indeed! Sometimes when I look back on my hopes and expectations, I am tempted to laugh.

At other times, I am tempted to cry.

THE fact that a person of Strongwill Dimity's puritanical character had invoked the Demon Rum in order to make a fast buck should have cued me that Perfection was no longer quite as perfect as it once had been. So should the fact that the crimes now being committed by the citizenry could no longer be classified as minor misdemeanors as had been the case in less sophisticated times, and the concomitant fact that the Righteousness Penitentiary—Perfection's only prison—was not large enough to keep pace with the mounting crime-wave. None of these inconsistencies, however, rang a bell, nor did the need of my judicial system to enact legislation relative to divorce proceedings, nor the appearance upon the scene of juvenile delinquency. What finally pulled my head down from the clouds and brought me face to face with reality was venality in my cabinet, and probably even this

wouldn't have done the trick if the offender had been someone other than my Secretary of Health and Education—old Upright Smith himself. A construction-company operator feathered the old man's nest to the tune of two hundred thousand credits, in return for which Upright handed the company a contract to build four new technological institutes at a cost far in excess of what the job was worth. When I heard about the transaction, I couldn't believe at first that my informer was telling me the truth.

Well, I hushed the matter up. What else could I do? When you go in for nepotism, you have to go in for it all the way. As for Upright, I gave him a good talking to, and I think that right there was when I really tumbled to the fact my brave new world was on the sick list. For, instead of hanging his head and showing contrition, the old man looked me straight in the eye as though his conscience was as clear as could be, and just before he left the room, he gave me a knowing wink.

I was tempted to follow him and make it clear that I hadn't said what I'd said merely because my position had demanded that I say it, but because I had meant it, but for the life of me, I couldn't get up out of my chair. I was stunned.

I don't know how long I sat

there before volition returned, but it must have been a good hour, because late afternoon had been in attendance when I had called Upright in, and now, darkness lay upon the White House lawn. A pair of French windows opened onto the patio, and I slipped outside, hopeful that a deep breath or two of the wintry air would clear my mind and enable me to isolate the cause of my father-in-law's illogical abandonment of the pedestal of righteousness upon which he had posed for over three-quarters of a century. But the wintry air did nothing for me whatsoever, and I stood there on the patio as numbly as I had sat behind the presidential desk.

I don't know what made me look up at the D.O., unless it was the striking pattern which the sharp shadows of the trees had cut upon the argent, snow-covered grounds. Since inflicting my "face-job" on him, I hadn't looked at him a dozen times, and even on those occasions I hadn't really seen him. I saw him this time, though. He was beaming warmly down at me, and his lips were curved in a big friendly grin. "Go to it, pal," his expression seemed to say, "do anything you want to. I'll forgive you for it, no matter what it is." I nearly fell off the patio.

You see what had happened, don't you? In making their al-

terations on the old boy's physiognomy, my projectiles had precipitated a tectonic revolution, and the revolution had continued, and was still continuing, the alterations which the projectiles had begun. The process hadn't been, and wasn't, rapid—at least from the standpoint of an observer stationed three hundred thousand miles away, and as a consequence none of the Perfec-tians had noticed any change at all—consciously, that is. And as for myself, I had noticed the change now only because my indifference to the old boy had resulted in my virtually ignoring him for years.

No wonder my brave new world had developed stomach ulcers. No wonder old Upright had stepped voluntarily down from his pedestal. No wonder husbands and wives were facing up to the fact that they no longer liked each other and were doing something about it. No wonder crime was on the rise. No wonder punishment was not being exacted. The frown on that face up there had been everybody's conscience. It had been the policeman around the corner. It had represented authority, and no man-made authority could ever take its place.

The "plastic-surgery" which I had performed had tempered that authority somewhat, but it hadn't destroyed that authority. Granted, the D.O.'s face had developed

an expression of gentleness immediately after my Projectiles had done their work; nevertheless, it still had retained sufficient firmness to keep the people in line. "Indulge yourselves a little," the new face had said. "Live it up a little. *But don't forget*," it had added, "*that I'll still be watching you.*"

And now, it said—Well, I've already told you what it said.

I went back into the White House and got a bottle of Strongwill Dimity's whiskey out of the kitchen cupboard. I poured myself a stiff jolt and drank it off. "So what do you do now, Benjamin Hill?" I asked.

I didn't answer.

BUT I didn't give up either. I tried all sorts of measures. I instituted a togetherness campaign in an attempt to cut down on the divorce rate. The divorce rate multiplied. I started girls' clubs, boys' clubs, and youth hostels in each of the ten towns in an attempt to keep the kids off the streets. Juvenile delinquency doubled. I added specially designed courses of study to the curricula of my technological institutes in the hope of cutting down on promiscuity. Promiscuity tripled. I established the Perfection Bureau of Investigation in an endeavor to curb crime. Crime crescendoed. And all the while I did these things, that indulgent old

man up there in the sky grinned ever more widely and ever more forgivingly.

As time passed, my inability to cope with the monster I had innocently created reduced me to a state of comatose bewilderment, and after a while I began to wonder which was the potter and which was the pot—whether the change in the D.O.'s expression was affecting the morality of the people, or whether the change in the morality of the people was affecting the D.O.'s expression. Regardless of which viewpoint I chose to take, the end result remained the same: moral decay.

I had planned on serving a third term, and then retiring. However, the third term never materialized. Strongwill Dimity, who had shed his political naïveté with more alacrity than his contemporaries had, organized a party called the Poor People's Protectorate and got himself elected on a platform that promised social security, parity, unemployment insurance, lower taxes, higher wages, and free medical care. Chastity, "Little" Chastity, Benjamin, Jr., and myself moved out of the White House and returned to our home in Purity. Stanch came with us, while Upright and Dutiful Smith moved into the big mansion which the old man had built in Righteousness with the taxpayers' money.

I began writing my memoirs.

In order to enable myself to get down on paper a first-hand account of the new *Zeitgeist*, I left my family in Stanch's care and set out on a tour of the ten towns. A single example of what I found in each instance should suffice to point up the general *status quo*:

In Righteousness, a fifty-two year old patriarch-parson was convicted of raping a twelve-year old girl and given a two-year suspended sentence.

In Truth, a blind woman was stoned to death by her neighbors because she accused them of behaving like swine. None of the neighbors were indicted.

In Prudence, three teenage girls were arrested for soaping obscene pictures on automobile windshields and were taken into night court. The judge reprimanded the arresting officer for being too strait-laced, dismissed the charge, slipped the girls a credit apiece, and told them to go out and have a good time.

In Straight-and-Narrow-Path, a fisherman turned his boat into a bawdy house and made more money in one month than he had made in all the previous months of his life put together.

In Discretion, a patriarch-parson murdered another patriarch-parson whom he found in bed with his wife. The judge who tried the case sentenced him to twenty-years, and then suspended it.

In Virtue, eight women clubbed a taxi-driver to death with their spiked heels because he couldn't fit all of them into his cab. Each of them received a suspended six-month sentence.

In Humility, two youthful scientists used a five-year old boy in a dissection experiment that cost him his life. They were given a year apiece in the Righteousness Penitentiary.

In Integrity, Strongwill Dimity and his fellow—"protectors" voted themselves a handsome raise in salary and augmented it with an equally handsome increase in their expense accounts.

In Transcendence, a woman neglected her three children to the extent that two of them died of malnutrition. The case never came to court.

In Purity, a young man named Benjamin Hill, Jr. broke into Affable Gray's store, sprung the strong box, and took off with nine thousand credits for parts unknown.

I HEADED straight for home the minute the chief of police told me the news. I threw open the door. "Chastity!" I called.

Chastity didn't answer, but "Little" Chastity did. She was entertaining her latest boy friend on the living room bench, and both of them were stoned. It made me sick just to look at her. "You're out of luck, dad-buddy,"

she said. "She ran away with Stanch."

I seized her shoulders and shook her. "That's not true!"

"Oh, but it is true, dad-buddy. And why shouldn't it be? It's high time you came down out of the clouds and looked around.

I slapped her. She laughed at me. I ran out of the house.

I looked up at the face of the D.O. It bore a pronounced leer now, and the right eye was contracted in such a way that the old boy seemed to be delivering a knowing wink. The over-all expression suggested complete corruption. All I could think of was the picture of Dorian Gray.

Spades should be called spades. This was not the picture of Dorian Gray. This was the picture of Perfection—and the "artist" was Benjamin Hill.

Fortunately, the "artist" still had a quantity of "pigment" left.

* * *

I was growing old. It took me four days to reach my PT-boat

this time. Two more to get ready. Three to go . . .

Look, I'm not saying that a stern god is the answer to mankind's problems. I don't know the answer to mankind's problems. I only know that a stern god comes closer to being the answer than a tolerant god does.

I let the remaining projectiles loose, and they wailed up from the mountainside like four angry banshees. I waited all day. Evening came, and that old roué climbed up into the sky. One, two, three, four. The smile disappeared. The wink was no more. Volcanic action took over, seas squirmed. Ridge-lips turned downward into a dour line. A frown so deep and dark and brooding that it bordered on being a scowl settled on the vast face, and it settled there for keeps. Chastity would be back in no time. So would my son.

So would the dark ages.

I didn't care. I raised my arms. "Let there be night!" I said.